

Best Use of Technology in the Government, Nonprofit or Education Sector Award

King County District Court improves customer service

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The project was bound to succeed — for all the wrong reasons.

King County District Court's call center was performing so poorly, it had "nowhere to go but up," said Tricia Crozier, the court's chief administrative officer.

Nearly half of all callers were hanging up before being helped.

"I'm embarrassed to say this," said Crozier, "but we were called out in the local press" for dismal customer service.

It's a different story today. Hang-ups are down from 44 percent to 7 percent. Wait times have plunged from nearly four minutes to less than one. And the average number of calls handled per clerk has increased nearly 20 percent.

Must be new technology, right? Wrong.

The technology that enables the call center to shine today is the same technology that prompted the press to give it a shiner. "It's more about [optimizing] the technology than the technology itself," said Crozier.

Undertaken with help from SolutionsIQ, King County District Court's call center makeover is the winner of the Best Use of Technology in the Government, Nonprofit or Education Sector Award.

King County District Court is actually

a network of nine courts serving the county's unincorporated communities plus 13 cities that contract with the county for municipal court services. In addition, a variety of specialized law enforcement agencies such as the Washington State Patrol and the Department of Fish and Wildlife

also rely on district court.

The court handles more than 500,000 phone calls a year from people asking about their court date, requesting a domestic violence protection order or looking for a family member in custody.

Before 2002, each of the nine courts in the district court network answered its own phones.

Establishing a call center in downtown Seattle with electronic access to records in all nine courts seemed like a smart response.

Last year, King County District Court turned to SolutionsIQ, a Redmond IT consultant, to identify topics callers are most interested in and reduce the number of buttons people must push to get help. The 12-person staff was trained to take better control of calls, and all of them were given wireless headsets so they don't have to put people on hold while they leave their desk to send a fax.

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• eCityGov Alliance

The eCityGov Alliance is an interlocal government agency that provides information about member Eastside cities to the public through ecityGov.net. This website provides residents with a central location to link to information about parks, construction permits, commercial property leases, maps, entertainment listing, how to pay taxes, road construction and city initiatives.

• Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Based in Olympia, this organization was founded in 1990 to provide support for those influenced by domestic violence. The group educates survivors on how to safely use technology to improve and rebuild their lives.